Premiers should fight climate change, not federal tax

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Body

Three weeks ago, young people took to the streets across Canada and around the world. They have never known a world without the threat of climate change, without intensifying storms, deadly heatwaves and raging wildfires. They look at their future, at the world they will be inheriting from us, and are challenging governments to do more.

We know the problem: we have too much pollution. If it's free to pollute, there will be more pollution. It is already costing Canadians. Last year, extreme weather caused $1.9 billion of insured damage in Canada. That's up almost 500 per cent in two decades. By 2050, the bill could be as much as $43 billion a year. Doing nothing is not an option.

That's why we're making sure it is no longer free to pollute in Canada. Most provinces and all territories have designed ways to price pollution that works for them. But Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Manitoba - all led by Conservative premiers - chose not to because they think it should be free to pollute. So we stepped up.

Under the federal system, by law, the money from pricing pollution will be returned to Canadians in those provinces - 90 per cent is going directly back to people through the Climate Action Incentive rebate when they file their taxes this year. Many Canadians I speak to want action on climate change, but they also want life to be affordable.

Under our plan, most families will actually be better off. People can save even more with practical solutions like a smart thermostat, LED light bulbs or taking public transit when they can. With the other 10 per cent, we will provide support for small businesses, schools, hospitals, colleges and Indigenous communities to save energy and cut pollution.

Since day one, our government has taken action on climate change, resetting the agenda after 10 years of inaction under the Conservatives. Scientists and economists have been telling us for years that climate change is an issue for our health and our planet and an opportunity for our economy. Yet some Conservative politicians deny this. It's easier for them to politicize and polarize than to step up and act. Instead of fighting climate change, they fight in courts.

Canada has a practical, effective and affordable plan to fight climate change. It's phasing out coal because it generates 9 per cent of Canada's electricity but 72 per cent of the sector's emissions. It's investing in renewables to power Canada on 90 per cent clean energy by 2030. It's building 1,200 public transit projects across the country to get people where they need to be in a faster, cleaner and cheaper way. And it's putting a price on pollution, because that's the right thing to do.

I have one question for Conservative politicians like Doug Ford, Andrew Scheer and Scott Moe: When farmers lose their crops like they did this summer, when your neighbours' basements are flooded because of quicker snowmelts and more rain, when jobs start to leave because our economies haven't kept up with the clean demand - will you have a plan then?

Premiers should fight climate change, not federal tax

Catherine McKenna is the federal minister of environment and climate change.

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